

AHPS Plays Key Role in West Texas

April 2004

A Texas emergency manager credits timely National Weather Service flood warnings and strong interagency cooperation with saving lives during a West Texas flood event April 3-4, 2004. When fast moving floodwaters caused an Interstate-20 bridge to collapse 15 miles west of Pecos, TX (Reeves County), late Sunday afternoon, nobody was on it. State and local authorities had already closed the bridge to traffic.

Jim DeBerry, hydrologic focal point at the **Midland Weather Forecast Office**, credited the **Advanced Hydrologic Prediction Service** as a key tool in issuing the timely warnings. *"This is our first real season to use FFMP (Flash Flood Monitoring and Prediction), and I love MPE (Multisensor Precipitation Estimator). They help a lot out here. They seem to work really excellent for our office. MPE really helps because our County Warning Area is so large. Because, in the outskirts of our radar coverage, it is useful to have contributions from the surrounding radars."*



Although several thousand cars and trucks used this bridge every day on Interstate 20, 15 miles west of Pecos, TX (Reeves County), no one was injured when it collapsed on April 4, 2004. Local officials had closed the bridge based on NWS flood warnings. Read all about it in the story below. Photo courtesy of Carolyn Dill, Texas Department of Transportation.



The same storm system that caused such deadly flooding south of the border, dumped an average of two to three inches in Reeves County, with up to seven inches in isolated areas. Floodwaters broke through a levee early Sunday afternoon allowing several feet of water to pour through the small town of Toyah, just west of the bridge site.

Working closely with the NWS West Gulf River Forecast Center, the Weather Forecast Office in Midland, TX, issued a total of 21 Flash Flood Warnings during the event, including 13 Flash Flood Warnings and Statements for Reeves County. A Flash Flood Statement was issued about an hour and a half before the collapse "

Reeves County Emergency Manager Rick Herrera, officers of the Texas Department of Transportation, Department Public Safety and the Sheriff's office then closed the bridge to traffic. *"We were still getting pounded by rain and we were still under the Flood Watch. We checked the forecasts and knew we would continue to be under a Flood Watch. So we blocked off the eastbound bridge - the one that collapsed - then noticed cracks in the westbound bridge. So we closed it off as well."*

Herrera says he was in close contact with the Midland Weather Forecast Office and local storm spotter network throughout the storm. *"It worked like clockwork and the National Weather Service deserves praise for the help they gave us."*